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Finding quality, affordable day care a challenge



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Story Features

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) -- While you can't put a price tag on your child's safety, many parents are often forced to choose price over quality when it comes to day care.

"If you're going to pay more you're probably going to be paying the staff of that particular place better. That's the other challenge in this process. What am I willing to pay for is really kind of the question," explained Mark Jansen, director of child care licensing in Michigan.

Jansen says child care costs vary across the state.

According to Child Care Aware (<http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/reports-and-research/costofcare/>), a nonprofit child care advocacy group, Michigan ranks in the bottom half of states for affordable child care for babies.

The Department of Education gets federal funding to help parents pay for child care, but some worry that money isn't being put to good use.

"Quite frankly, we're one of the worst states in the country in terms of how we pay for child care for families who are part of our public child care system," said Mina Hong.

Hong works with non-profit advocacy group **Michigan's Children** (<http://www.michiganschildren.org/>). She says the state isn't investing enough in child care to keep costs down for parents and quality providers in business.

COSTLY CARE

A new survey by Child Care Aware shows a low income family in Michigan with two children pays 69 percent of its income to child care centers.

A single parent with two children invests 82 percent of his or her income into child care centers.

Hong notes that Michigan is one of only three states that pays providers by the hour for subsidized children, saying that adds to the state's child care woes.

"As an hourly payment in Michigan, what we do is add extra burden on top for families and for child care providers because they're not going to know for sure how much money they're going to be able to pull in for the kids who are subsidized."

Hong says as long as the state doesn't step up for families trying to work and pay for child care, more providers will simply choose to shut down.

While quality and safety is critical, Jansen says new laws requiring more checks on providers may also prompt them to just get out of the business.

"You've got more and more providers asking do I want to go through all of this? Now we're going to change the law, we're going to require fingerprint background checks," said Jansen.

FINDING A PROVIDER

The Michigan Department of Education set up one tool to help you you find day care in your neighborhood. Great Start to Quality is funded with a federal grant.

If you click on the link for parents (<http://greatstarttoquality.org/parents>), you can fill in your address and find day care in your neighborhood, see what they charge and even see how they're rated.

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